Government is already aware of the importance of the communication system as one of the essential infrastructure facilities for the growth of the various key sectors of the economy including industrial sector. A defective or inadequate communication system—postal and telecommunications—is only one of the impediments to rapid industrial development.

For the development of the communication sector, an outlay of Rs. 4,825 crores has been earmarked in the Seventh Plan. Various programmes have also been drawn up to expand and modernise postal and telecommunication systems. With regard to telepone network, it has made significant expansion from 80,000 lines in 1974 to 30 lakh lines presently. During the Seventh Plan period, about 9.5 lakh new telephone connections are envisaged to be put in operation. Improving the efficiency of the telecommunication system by replacing obsolete equipment, introducing new technology like satellite, digital electronics and optical fibre, introduction of non-voice services, data communications, of cable records & fault-repair service to bring down duration of faults are some of the measures being taken to improve telecom services.

With regard to telegraph service, periodical monitoring of the quality of services is undertaken. In order to reduce transmission delays, Store & Forward Telegraph Systems have been introduced connecting 250 stations. Under a time bound plan, various measures for modernisation of the network are being planned such as Large Capacity Message Switching Systems at metropolitan centres, development of new telegraphic apparatus like electronic key boards, phonocoms concentrators and other operational aids etc. The existing electro-mechanical teleprinters are planned to be replaced by electronic teleprinters in the telegraphic network in a phased manner.

As far as Road Transport is concerned, about 9 lakh trucks are operating in the country under various national and zonal permits. It may be added that Government have approved a number of industrial licences recently for the manufacture of light commercial vehicles.

Department of Railways have their own operational/administrative communication circuits such as Microwave System/Underground Telcom Cable/ Overhead Alignments. In addition, some circuits have been rented from P & T Department. These circuits function satisfactorily. These communication circuits are exclusively meant for the functioning of the Railways.

Damage claim for Bhopal Gas victims

2127. SHRI B. SATYANARAYAN REDDY: Will the Minister of INDUSTRY be pleased to state.

(a) whether it is a fact that India has claimed damages amounting to more than $ 200 Billion for the victims of Bhopal Gas Tragedy;

(b) if so, what is the reaction of the Government of U.S.A. to this damage claim; and

(c) what Steps Government have taken to follow up their claim in view of the fact that the victims are still suffering from the after-effects of the Gas Tragedy?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF CHEMICALS AND PETRO-CHEMICALS (SHRI R.K. JAICHANDRA SINGH): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c)) A complaint has been field on 8th April. 1985 in the United States Federal District Court. Southern District. New york claiming *inter alia.* compensatory and punitive damages. The First and Second Pre-trial Conferences were held on 16th April, 1985 and 7th August, 1985 respectively. After the Second Pre-trial Conference, the judge has ordered "discovery" on the limited issue of 'forum non convenience' Oral arguments have been fixed by the Court for January 3, 1985.